

The Seven Stages of Dream Analysis

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Summary: The first time it happened was three months after his death. He was standing on the threshold, motionless, the expression on his face a mask of endless grief. "Come here," asked John gently, and Sherlock came.

The Seven Stages of Dream Analysis

****Author's note: **** This one shot was originally published in German on Fanfiktion.de. Since I don't have a beta reader and no one to correct my translation attempts, I apologize for mistakes in advance. Please let me know if they are so annoying that it disturbs the reading experience. I really do hope you enjoy it. Also, you can read this story on Archive of our own where it was first published.

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* * *

><p>The first time it happened was three months after his death.<p>

All the condolence cards had found their way into the bins in the backyard behind the house, but his way to Ella was still the same.

John was convinced that he'd find it in the deepest of all sleep stages without as much as even stumbling over a pebble.

Some things changed.

Some things, however, remained the same.

"You said it didn't change. 'A static picture just like a frozen kaleidoscope.' Your words."

Ella watched him carefully as if she feared that another wave of rage might overtake him and carry him out of the house once more.

The words were standing in the middle of the room, lost, as if they were made of glass, as if they were easy to ignore, as if you could walk right through them or open the window to dismiss them into oblivion.

Endless room.

"What's changed this time, John?"

The doctor looked out of the window and into the glowing colours of autumn.

September gold.

"It's not just ... fragments anymore," he started haltingly. It was so much harder to stop the clear images inside his head from flowing out in an incomprehensible stream.

"Fragments?", asked Ella in feigned interest and her pen scratched over the paper.

"Until now, there were just extracts desultory parts of his face just like in a kaleidoscope."

A scratching sound, the rustling of paper.

Like pieces of a mirror.

Puzzle pieces.

"And now?"

"He was standing in the door."

"In the door?"

"The door to my room. Well, it was his once, but" He described a vague hand motion as if it explained why he moved into Sherlock's room. "it was a logic thing to do."

Ella continued to take notes and didn't look at him.

John's eyes followed the letters on the paper in distrust while he tried to gather enough courage to vocalize his fears.

"Did you talk to him?", inquired the young woman with a serious expression. It remained a mystery to the former military doctor as to why she didn't laugh at him for his fantasies, but then he remembered that it was her job to listen to him.

Yes, thought John dejected. _And all he did was turning around and walking away._

"No."

Ella kept writing.

"Do you think I should?"

She looked up and tapped with the back of her pen onto the chequered paper. 13 pages what once had been 26. Thirteen new wasted pages and thirteen to follow just like the previous ones. Just yesterday, she'd started a new pad.

God, he really wished his mind would stop letting him notice things like that.

"It's your dream, John. Figure it out."

* * *

><p>The evenings had turned into something similar to a ritual since that one day in June.<p>

Making tea.

Taking sleeping pills.

Drinking tea.

Going to bed.

Waiting.

Waiting for sleep to come?

Rather waiting for visitor associated with sleep, the dreams wherein everything was the way it was supposed to be if there existed no destiny.

Waiting for Sherlock.

Ella had prescribed a double dose but even that took half an hour to make his eyelids grow heavy and one of these seldom invisible smiles crept on John's features.

Darkness welcomed him like a long missed friend and when he opened his eyes again, he was dreaming.

He was standing on the threshold, motionless, the expression on his face a mask of endless grief. It was horrifying how real he seemed to be, how well John's memory put the different memory pieces back together and united them in one final picture.

His pale skin was literally glowing in the moonlight which was reflected in the dark curl's shine. The blue-grey eyes shimmered brightly like the moon sickle outside the window. Not even the affectionate wrinkles around his eyes were able to break the angularity and sharpness of his features.

Black trousers joined in polished shoes and beneath the jacket, John caught a glimpse of a midnight blue shirt.

Sherlock hadn't changed in the least despite the vortex of John's fantasy. Nonetheless, the moonlight turned him into a picture of his own appearance, an idealised reflection of reality.

A picture on the wall, an exhibit in a museum without visitors, untouchable, locked behind thick glass.

Nothing but a dream, reminded John himself and something constricted painfully in his chest.

Nothing but a dream, just like the shattered picture of a kaleidoscope.

"Sherlock," he whispered and stared at his friend.

Sherlock didn't answer.

The two pairs of eyes met silently as if it was the only way to exchange words.

At some point, John's eyelids grew heavier and no matter how hard he tried to fight against it, he eventually lost to sleep.

Before his dream evaporated, he saw Sherlock turn around and watched him disappear into the night.

Nothing.

* * *

><p>"You talked to him."<p>

"Yes."

"But there was no reply."

"How do you know?"

It wasn't really a question, since John - if he was honest with himself - didn't want to hear the answer.

"These dreams are common when we lose someone who was very close to us - in any relationship. The deceased's presence reminds us in a painful way that this person is now out of our reach and that we'll never be able to approach them again."

John knew that the words were supposed to offer a logical explanation, that they were meant to comfort him, but somehow, they ripped the abysses even further open.

"When he's standing on your threshold again, you let him go, John. It's the only way to free yourself from your grief."

He nodded obediently.

* * *

><p>"Sherlock"<p>

He stood there just like all the nights before, motionless and more similar to a ghost than to a living human being, his cheeks hollower than the first time he'd appeared in John's dreams.

The Sherlock of his imagination followed probably the same

self-destructive path as his living counterpart had done. Maybe he lived on in John's dreams while the doctor left them with every sunrise, forced to return to a state called 'being'.

A life was defined in a different way.

"Come here," asked John gently but he didn't expect Sherlock to follow the invitation. The detective would probably just turn around and leave just like every other night.

When the slim figured started moving towards John, his surprise was even bigger.

Shyly, he offered his hand to Sherlock who seemed to struggle with himself whether or not it was a good decision to take it before he finally gave in and let his hand slide in John's. The sudden contact hit John completely unprepared. Maybe, he'd expected Sherlock to turn to dust under his touch or that he could reach through him as if he were a ghost. Instead, the pale fingers interlaced with his. Whatever it was that ran through the dream picture's veins, John wasn't able to deduce it from this distance.

His heartbeat echoed loudly in the doctor's ears and he realized to his own surprise that the hole in his chest did no longer exist. Instead of gashing darkness, there was life. Breathing felt suddenly easier than before, and the oxygen filled his lungs without causing any pain.

For the first time since Sherlock's death, he felt alive again.

Hours must have passed while they simply stared at each other, hands never interrupting the contact. Maybe it was merely minutes...

Eventually, Sherlock turned his head toward the window where it started to dawn. An apologetic look crossed John's before the hand slipped cautiously out of his.

No, please, don't, he wanted to hold him back, but the fantasy didn't oblige and Sherlock disappeared like every night.

When John woke up, his hand was lying on the mattress beside him, empty and lost.

* * *

><p>"It's not a ghost?"<p>

"No."

Lost in thoughts, John painted pictures on the fogged up glass.

"You can touch him."

"Yes."

"And he can touch you."

"Yes."

"John." Seriousness carried her voice when she stepped up to him in front of the window.

A glass prison.

"You should stop these dreams. As long as you get caught up in them, it might help you to cope with the loss, but it will destroy you the more time goes by."

I don't care, thought John. _If he'll stay with me that way, I'll happily lose my mind._

* * *

><p>He stared at their tangled up hands with a smile on his face, enjoying the little warmth that was radiating from Sherlock's skin.<p>

Even for a fantasy image it must be uncomfortable to spend the entire night standing beside his bed - or was time moving faster in dreams?

Slower?

Without giving much thought, John shoved over and pulled Sherlock closer, but the detective retreated with a sad shake of his head.

"Please, Sherlock."

Another head-shake.

"Please," repeated John desperately. There was nothing he longed for more than to feel the familiar body next to his, the warmth, the security.

"It's all I ask of you. Please - just this once."

Hesitantly, the pale eyes flickered from John to the empty mattress and with an anxious expression, he eventually sunk down beside John so their eyes were on the same level. The pale blue of cold eyes curled in gentle waves and John inhaled deeply. He took in the familiar scent of a distant calm ocean, unwilling to ever let it go.

"I miss you," he whispered in a broken voice and tightened his grip on the pale hand. "Very much so."

A stricken smile threw dark shadows over Sherlock's face and long fingers closed reassuringly around John's, but he didn't reply.

Of course not.

He never did.

Fantasies don't speak.

* * *

><p>"He follows your orders?" Scepticism carried Ella's voice and the pen continued to scratch reluctantly over the paper.<p>

Page 34.

Pad 2.

Pen 3.

"Sometimes," responded John dejectedly.

"Sometimes?"

More scratching, more letters, more riddles, more shards.

"Not every order. He allows me to touch him, to talk to him ... that's it."

Ella frowned. "You expect different from a product of your imagination?"

"He never stays," murmurs John. "Never longer than the dawn of morning."

* * *

><p>Lost in his own thoughts, he ran his hand up and down the familiar features, watching Sherlock's eyes moving behind the closed lids with every touch.<p>

He looked worse â€" a shadow of his former self and John wanted to throw his arms around him, reassuring him that nobody was able to hurt Sherlock as long as he stayed by his side.

But Sherlock was dead.

He didn't come back.

Only in John's dreams.

"I miss the music," admitted he to the darkness of night, and the words surprised him with their simplicity.

Gentle fingers wandered over the pale back of Sherlock's hand and a content sigh filled the heavy morning air â€" one of the few sounds the fantasy allowed in John's presence and the aim of every single night.

"Bach. Beethoven. Mozart. Vivaldi. I really wish I could hear you play one last time."

With a sudden movement, Sherlock stopped John's wandering fingers and kept them firmly in his hold for seemingly endless minutes. When he let go of them eventually, he pressed a gentle kiss to the wrinkles mourn had left on John's forehead.

Goodbye.

* * *

><p>"John" Ella watched him carefully and caught his folded hands with her's. The unexpected touch made him feel the kind of safety he'd been missing for so many weeks and a cosy shiver ran down his spine.<p>

"These dreams have to stop! As hard as it must seem to you, but they will destroy you eventually and I value you far too much to stand back and watch that happen."

The doctor nodded obediently.

"I will try."

Sherlock smelled like pines and the unknown, like adventures and chases after criminals. With a relieved sigh, John buried his face in the Consulting Detective's neck and Sherlock pulled him closer into a tight hug.

Please, thought John desperately, _ never let me go again_.

Sherlock's skin beneath his lips was cold and clammy just like how John imagined the skin of a ghost must feel like. If he'd been that cold when he'd still been alive?

Snowstorms.

Everything John had always seen in his eyes.

Sun was rare at North Pole.

Maybe he was there, now.

Maybe he was missing him too.

With a hint of hesitance, John put a bit more pressure in the loving touch and a shiver passed through the fragile body next to him.

He let his hand smoothly run down the exposed pale neck, the cold throat and Sherlock's neck fell back.

"Come back, Sherlock."

Ice-blue eyes stared at him as if a storm of thousand words was to break out of them.

On the horizon, the sun was rising.

* * *

><p>Ella had taken down the picture.<p>

Good, thought John and looked away because he didn't like changes in general.

Not anymore.

He'd never liked it.

"Johnâ€¦ I think we're similar â€" you and me."

His dark eyes wandered back to her with mild interest and a pejorative sound escaped his throat.

Pieces of a mirror.

"We're both heading into a street without being able to see the end, and we're both scared of what we might find behind the fog."

"Nothing whatsoever."

"Are you sure?"

"I know it."

"Not a dead-end-street? No fire escapes? Maybe a roomy family home."

"There's nothing," insisted he and stared at the driving snow beyond the windows.

"I'm not even sure if it's a street."

"See? Me neither."

* * *

><p>John closed his eyes happily and allowed himself to believe that there was a deeper meaning to the embrace.<p>

They were lying in his bed " Sherlock's bed " closely one next to the other, feeling their breaths tickling the skin, their clothes somewhere beyond the sheets.

John told himself that it was just the beginning. The beginning of something wonderful. Maybe the beginning of a story. Sherlock's skin as pale as almond leaves or the blank strangeness of a new chapter waiting for him to be written.

He wasn't cold any longer.

His skin burned under their touch, his tears were hot under John's fingers.

"Sherlock," he whispered, but the fantasy hadn't allowed him to look into his eyes.

Instead, he left him to the imagination, the curious fantasy, the question whether the snow storms had disappeared or the morning had dawned.

Lost in thoughts, he painted small circles on the moonlight-lit upper arm, wondering if the glistening illusion was just another product of his fantasy.

>A kaleidoscope of memories.<p>

"Do you believe in miracles?" he asked the night insecurely.

Sherlock didn't respond because he never did.

Instead, John could feel the weak nod while staring at their interlaced hands.

* * *

><p>"You got close?"<p>

Ella's wonderment didn't surprise him in the least. He questioned her sanity anyway, since she still seemed to believe him.

Hell, even he himself doubted his sanity, but that didn't count, right?

He was allowed to.

"How close?"

"Very."

Notes.

"But he left."

"Pardon?" John gazed back, stared at her in incomprehension.

"By morning," she specified her statement. "He left you once again."

He avoided her eyes, stared at the snow outside.

"Yes."

* * *

><p>"You know that you could stay..."<p>

Sherlock's hand was drawing lazy circles on John's naked back.

His motions stopped briefly before they continued the pattern.

"You could also get up and never return," murmured John quietly and tightened his embrace as if he could keep Sherlock forever this way.

The dream picture seemed to share his dark thoughts because it reciprocated, burying its face in the dark blond hair.

"Why didn't we do any of this earlier?"

Silence.

"Were we really so scared of it?"

Tranquillity.

"I'm not scared anymore."

Something wet hit his forehead and John looked up in surprise just as

Sherlock turned his face away to stare out of the window where the morning dawn painted the sky in scarlet.

The pale eyes were glittering in the early light of a new day and his cheeks mirrored the pain of another separation, reflecting it on high cheekbones.

* * *

><p>"You're entering a relationship with a product of your fantasy."<p>

"I don't know any more what's fantasy and what isn't."

"It's dangerous, John."

"I know that."

"Danger always portrayed an attraction to you."

"I know that, too."

"And that's why you decided to lead your life like this?"

"No."

"Why, then?"

"Because my life has always been like this."

* * *

><p>"Ella thinks I'm mad. Can you imagine?"<p>

A loving smile crossed Sherlock's features and he pulled John closer to him. Their lips met with the ghost of a kiss.

"She's only worried. I told her that it's useless. After all, I shared a flat with you for nearly two years. Nobody who isn't completely mad does that."

Another kiss.

More kisses.

More touches.

A sigh.

"It's nice being mad," whispered John and interlaced his fingers with Sherlock's as soon as they were lying side by side again.

"Everything else would be boring."

He wished Sherlock would answer him only once even if it was only one single word. Instead, only small sighs escaped him, a repressed, disappointed moan when the end of another night crept over the rooftops.

"Do you think it's sad to spend a life living in dreams?", asked John without expecting an actual answer. The fantasy shook hesitantly its head.

"Of course not. You're a product of my dreams, why would you say something different?"

Morning came and Sherlock left.

* * *

><p>It took John a long time to make the final decision.<p>

The cold winter months had long gone when he finally mustered enough courage to leave the light on his nightstand on, and he stared up at the grey ceiling.

He wouldn't fall asleep.

He'd wait for the morning to come.

He'd let Sherlock go.

Forevermore.

The beige above him started to blend into grey and eventually faded into a dark midnight blue until even the light on his nightstand couldn't gather enough strength to fight the darkness.

And then, there was a familiar face in his line of sight, the bedsprings protested with a quiet squeak, but John didn't do anything to stop Sherlock from lying down next to him.

Soon after, he was no longer staring at the ceiling, but into deep abysses of bright grey eyes in which the snowstorm was raving.

His touch ghosted above the high cheekbones and downward to his chin. The dark eyelids fluttered before they fell shut.

That night, his imagination must have been tired because all they did was lying next to each other, staring into the other's eyes as if they couldn't quite believe to be so close.

At some point on the way to the peak of dawn, Sherlock must have pulled him into an embrace and John had wanted to shout _I'm trying to forget you, _but everything that had left his mouth was a weak "Take me with you."

Sherlock had stared at him, then, his features filled with a seldom sadness and eventually, he'd shaken his head, although hesitantly, which had John's heart shattered into thousands of shards.

Just like a kaleidoscope.

Then, John fell asleep and he'd forgotten about his plan to lock the door.

An experiment.

It would have been an experiment.

Ghosts could walk through locked doors, right?

He awoke in a cocoon of happiness, and for the length of a blink of an eye, he was convinced that Ella had been right when she'd said that he was now ready to let Sherlock go.

As soon as he caught the thought, he set it free and stared down at pale arms which kept him in a tight embrace.

He could feel the breath tickling his neck where skin met hair.

He could feel the warmth of another body close to his.

The feeling of a beating heart against his back.

"I won't leave you ever again," whispered the voice as lips pressed a gentle kiss on the skin between his shoulder blades.

John's gaze wandered out of the window where the sun was painting the sky with the burning red of another dawning morning.

* * *

><p>Thank you so much for reading to the end. If you liked it, I'd be overjoyed if you left a comment. If you didn't like it, I'd be happy about a comment, too. In the end, I do want to improve, so any criticism (concerning plot, characters, English, etc.) is very much appreciated.

End
file.